



Australian Government
Attorney-General's Department

National Firearms Register
Public Consultation

Submission

April 2023

Australian Gun Safety Alliance

The Australian Gun Safety Alliance (AGSA) is a broad coalition of voices representing the interests of the community in ensuring that we maintain vigilance on issues of gun safety.

AGSA members are from the public health, medical, hospital, first responders, unions, and children services sectors along with faith organisations and those involved with preventing family violence. All members are shown on [our website](#).

Many of the members are signatories to this Submission. Others are making their own submission.

AGSA is not politically aligned and receives no corporate or individual donations. It is funded by modest philanthropic donations and in-kind services by members.

The Australian Gun Safety Alliance understands that the majority of gun owners in Australia are law abiding, responsible people who are not criminals. However, we believe that all Governments must do everything in their power to avoid a slide towards an American culture of gun entitlement. They should also uphold their public commitment to the National Firearms Agreement.

We are strong advocates for the preamble of the National Firearms Agreement which states clearly that the use and possession of a firearm is a privilege and that the overriding need to ensure public safety should dictate the regulation of firearms.

The convenience or commercial interests of firearm owners, manufacturers, importers and retailers should never take precedent over community safety.

We advocate this message to every jurisdiction and consult regularly on firearm policy, legislation and regulation.

Introduction

We commend the Australian government, and the Prime Minister and Attorney-General in particular, for pursuing the opportunity to bring jurisdictions together to form a National Firearms Register.

The tragic events in Wiembilla in December 2022 constitute an unfortunate example of tragedy driving reform. We have seen that in the firearm space in 1996 with Port Arthur and then the Lindt Café Siege in 2014.

Jurisdictions have the opportunity to work together to complete the final plank of the 1996 National Firearms Agreement and create a National Firearms Register of firearms, licensed firearm owners and the details of the firearms they have registered.

The National Firearms Agreement is centred on “ensuring public safety” and was always predicated on *“Jurisdictions agree to store registrations on a system which is able to share information with the national information-sharing hub.”*

The community concerns raised since December on the issue of linked firearm data mirror the surprise of the community when they know that jurisdictions are still not compliant with the National Firearms Agreement.

In March 2023 ¹, 27% of respondents to a NSW Essential Report survey thought that our gun laws were too weak. A further 61% think that our gun laws are about right. Interestingly, of those aged over 55 years, who clearly remember the Port Arthur tragedy, 46% think are gun laws are too weak.

We have consulted with the AGSA members and are pleased to make the following comments on the questions presented in the Consultation Paper.

¹ Essential Report – 20 March 2023- commissioned by Gun Control Australia – not published.

Question 1: What capabilities should a National Firearms Register provide to government regulators and law enforcement?

Real Time Data

An accurate firearm register, accessible in real time, is crucial for both police and public safety. Police responding to any report of conflict, a domestic violence incident, a self-harm-related risk or any number of situations where the risk of violence is elevated should have every piece of data at their disposal to reduce their personal risk and the risk to those involved.

There are now over 3.5 million firearms registered in Australia² – the vast majority held in Australian homes. The number of unregistered firearms is still not well known. In 2021-22 over 18,000 firearms and parts were handed in during the first year of a Permanent National Amnesty³.

Data about registered firearms and licensed firearm owners involved in criminal activity is poor. Back in 2012, Queensland Police Union president Ian Leavers stated: *“Statistically, since 2000, police are just as likely to be killed by licensed firearm owners.”*⁴

AGSA has always supported law abiding firearm owners. But it is not always criminal activity that police and first responders deal with. Recent analysis of firearm deaths and injuries in NSW found a very strong relationship between the prevalence of firearms by location and local rates of intentional self-harm with a firearm.⁵

When all this is considered, better protecting our law enforcement and first responders by allowing them rapid access to information about firearm owners, the number and types of firearms at a particular address, is a key benefit of the National Firearms Register.

Notification of Red Flags

NSW State Coroner, Magistrate Teresa O’Sullivan made several comments and recommendations into the Edwards shootings⁶ that related to notifications to and from the NSW Firearms Registry. A National Firearms Register should be able to include appropriate notification to law enforcement of a range of potential “red flags” that better prepare them in their interactions.

Decreasing regulatory impost on the firearms community

The NSW Firearms Registry has engaged the firearms industry and firearm dealers in particular into their new Gun Safe system and by all accounts, this has offered many benefits to the industry.

Firearm dealers remain an important stakeholder in firearm registration and the transfer of firearms. If they continue to be engaged, the data efficacy of a National Register will be improved.

² <https://www.sydney.edu.au/news-opinion/news/2021/04/28/new-gun-ownership-figures-revealed-25-years-on-from-port-arthur.html>

³ <https://www.ag.gov.au/crime/publications/permanent-national-firearms-amnesty-annual-report-2021-2022>

⁴ <https://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/national/queensland/more-people-will-die-police-union-berates-gun-law-overhaul-20120827-24vdz.html>

⁵ <https://www.mja.com.au/journal/2021/215/9/gun-violence-australia-2002-2016-cohort-study>

⁶

https://coroners.nsw.gov.au/documents/findings/2021/Inquest_into_the_deaths_of_John_Jack_and_Jennifer_Edwards_-_findings_of_State_Coroner_dated_7_April_2021.pdf

International Obligations

Efficient and accurate small arms record-keeping has become a key global standard, most notably in the United Nations small arms Programme of Action (UNPoA), the Firearms Protocol to the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (TOC) and the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT).

Australia was an early signatory to each of these international instruments, and for the past two decades has been one of their strongest supporters in international fora.

Key to these global agreements is the United Nations Modular Small Arms Control Information Compendium (MOSAIC), whose detailed recommendations should be considered as baseline requirements for Australia's National Firearms Register.

Question 2: Should a National Firearms Register trace more than firearms, for example firearms accessories, magazines, parts and ammunition?

We understand that a Register can only record individual objects if each one is indelibly marked with a unique identifier. This is almost always a serial number, micro-stamp or other individual alphanumeric code.

At present, most accessories, magazines, parts, and rounds of ammunition are almost never marked in such a way as to distinguish them from other identical items, therefore their registration is problematic without forensic evidence such as ballistic imaging.

We do believe that some registered accessories, like silencers or sound suppressors should have, or be retro-fitted with, a unique identifier as a priority and have then included in the National Firearms Register.

The inclusion of other parts, including ammunition should be considered in a subsequent phase of the project.

Question 3: Do you have any comments on the benefits a National Firearms Register will offer to law enforcement and community safety, including any broader benefits that should be explored?

AGSA members believe that an accurate and effective National Firearms Register will continue to encourage generational changes in attitudes to firearms and ammunition among police, firearm owners and the public. For example:

- An increase in accountability, registration and transparency should see a reduction in theft of firearms from licensed gun owners and licensed firearm owners, especially in rural, regional, and remote communities.
- Dedicated firearm task forces will continue to demonstrate the power of information-based policing as more accurate and accessible data becomes available from a National Firearms Register
- The development of a National Firearms Register will reassure the public that Australia is working to implement preventative measures such as 'red flag' interventions. These measures have the potential not only to identify and intervene in situations of potential armed violence but also in firearm-related self-harm, which is responsible for 78% of gun deaths in Australia.
- Firearm dealers will continue to be co-opted into public safety measures, for example as invested allies in firearm amnesties and national registration drives to reduce the 'grey market' stockpile of illicit weapons and as providers of real-time data on firearm and ammunition transactions

- A National Firearms Register will assist to elevate the most inefficient state and territory firearm registries as the Register will be dependent on data and all jurisdictions will have an inherent interest in assisting those struggling to meet the minimum data requirements.
- A National Firearms Register will include rapidly accessible data not only on the great majority of gun owners and firearms never to be involved in violence or self-harm, but also on individuals and their weapons at much higher levels of risk. For example, in all 15 mass shootings in Australia from 1987 to 2022, 51% of the victims were killed by a licensed firearm owner with a lawfully possessed firearm – that is, guns and gun owners whose data was held in a register⁷.
- Australia's world-recognised improvements to firearm-related public safety were driven by data and recommendations contained in the proceedings of 11 public inquiries and reports which preceded the Port Arthur shootings. Similarly, information assembled by a National Firearms Register will fill important gaps in the most influential element required for evidence-based public policy, which is accurate data
- By filling the last major gap in Australia's post-Port Arthur political promises to prevent firearm injury, an efficient National Firearms Register will also increase public confidence in regulatory institutions.

Question 4: What other capabilities could a National Firearms Register have that would be of benefit to the community, including to lawful firearms owners?

Transparency of firearm data

There is currently no access to de-identified national firearm data that would help with policy review, and public health measures.

Negin et al⁸ showed that with access to data, real public health strategies to prevent firearm injury and self-harm could be identified.

The Attorney General Department, through the Australian Institute of Criminology should commit to a de-identified Annual Report of the data within the National Firearms Register.

Question 5: Do you have any comments on the creation of a verification service to support licensing and permit systems?

We support a system that would allow verification of licensing and permits.

We see that as having benefits in the supply of ammunition, access to gun ranges and the transfer of firearms.

Question 6: Do you think trusted entities should be able to electronically communicate with firearms registries, if so, what capabilities should be available to trusted entities such as firearms dealers?

We support the access to register information by trusted entities who have gone through the same probity checks as licensed firearm owners.

That would require authorisation of firearm dealers and range officers.

⁷ <https://www.gunpolicy.org/documents/5902-alpers-australia-mass-shootings-1971-2022>

⁸ <https://www.mja.com.au/journal/2021/215/9/gun-violence-australia-2002-2016-cohort-study>

Question 7: Do you have any comments on the information proposed to be held by a National Firearms Register?

Minimum requirements for a National Firearms Register

AGSA members feel the following should be the minimum expectation of data held in a National Register.

- A single identifier for every firearm
- A single identifier for every firearm licence
- The serial number and any other markings on the firearm
- Identify every individual with a firearms licence
 - If they own a registered firearm
 - The type of firearm
 - The number of each type of firearm
 - The address the firearms are stored
 - The last time the storage was checked
 - Any special conditions on the licence
 - Any previous “red flag” notices

Further contact details:

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Australian Gun Safety Alliance members supporting this submission:



Standing strong
against family
violence

